

Something Weird by moonflowers

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: 5+1 Things, Fluff, Kids' PoV, M/M, Misunderstandings, Outing, POV Multiple, POV Outsider, Relationship Reveal, Secret Relationship, Snooping, So hecking floofy, but not really??

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-04-27

Updated: 2018-04-27

Packaged: 2022-04-22 04:42:00

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,517

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

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The other three had his attention immediately, wide-eyed and waiting for what he had to say next. "Upside Down stuff?" said Max.

"Is it El?" Lucas asked.

"Is everyone okay?" Will asked, twisted around in the front seat.

"Steve has a girlfriend."

Or: Five kids who try to figure out who Steve's 'secret girlfriend' is, and one kid who already knows.

Something Weird

Author's Note:

I wrote this pretty quick on a whim. It's a kind of 5 + 1, although Dustin gets two sections, and there's sort of a bonus one at the end, so it's more like 1 + 5 + 1 + 1. I do what I want.

Title's from the Ghostbusters theme.

It really wasn't Dustin's fault he found out, okay? People shouldn't talk so loud, or so... about Steve, if they didn't want him to listen in. It was Friday night, and a bit later than usual, when Jonathan had arrived to pick them up from Mike's place. As soon as they'd all said their goodbyes, Mike was back in the basement talking to El over the radio, Will, Max and Lucas already on their way out to Jonathan's car, when Dustin realised he'd forgotten something.

"Shit."

"What is it?" Will stopped so suddenly that Lucas walked right into him.

"Left something behind," Dustin said, already on the way back to the house, "I'll catch you guys up."

"Whatever," Max said, Lucas rolled his eyes.

Dustin let himself back into the house. The hallway was empty, Mike's parents out for the evening and Nancy and Jonathan still saying goodnight or whatever. He went into the kitchen, scanning the counter tops for the half-eaten Three Musketeers bar he'd left there somewhere - like hell was he leaving *that* behind - grabbing it and dashing back out again. Nancy and Jonathan were still talking in the living room, and Dustin sped up. He didn't need to hear their mushy goodnights, thanks but no thanks. And he'd have to sit next to Max and Lucas holding hands and pretending they weren't on the drive home too. There was only so much romance he could take. But he paused by the door when he heard them say Steve's name.

He and Nancy had been broken up for months now, and Dustin knew they were all like really close friends still, but why would they be talking about Steve when they should have been going through their soppy goodbye routine? Concerned for his buddy - he and Steve were practically best friends, come on, so that made it his business too - Dustin crept closer, still hidden around the corner, to listen in.

"We would have heard something, though," that was Jonathan. "Like, I know he's not as... high up the ladder as he was before, but he hangs out with Hargrove and the basketball guys a lot, I mean. People'd be talking about it."

"I know, but," Nancy hesitated, "maybe no one else knows."

"Come on Nancy, if Steve was dating someone, the whole school would know about it. He wasn't exactly subtle when you two were together." Yeah, Dustin's eyes still hurt from the mere glimpse he'd caught of the mountain of red, glittery shit Steve had gotten Nancy for Valentine's Day when they were dating. Steve was cool, but he had absolutely no chill when it came to romance.

"Yeah, but he's a little different now, since going through all of this Upside Down crap twice over. We all are, Jonathan."

"He's less of a douche, yeah - "

"Jonathan!"

"It's true! He's less of a douche, but I somehow doubt he's less of a romantic. You don't think if he was dating someone, he wouldn't be driving her to school, bringing her flowers, kissing her by the lockers and... whatever?"

"That makes sense, I guess," Nancy said grudgingly.

"Also, wouldn't he have told us? Like, we're his friends, y'know?"

"I don't know," Nancy said. "Maybe he feels weird talking to us about stuff like that."

"Maybe. He and Hargrove are thick as thieves these days, maybe he talks to him about shit like that. And I mean," he hesitated, "if he

really doesn't want to tell us, then maybe we should leave it alone."

"I know but," Nancy sighed in frustration. "You said it yourself, we're his friends. I just want to make sure he's okay. Things between us didn't end great, you know that, and I just want good things for him. And no one else might have noticed, but I dated him for a long time, okay, and I know what he looks like when he's in love."

"Fine, okay. Then I guess just ask him about it. He'd tell you if you asked him Nancy, I know he would."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Stop worrying, he can take care of himself."

"Okay. You're right. Okay."

The scheduled smushy goodbyes got started right on track after that, so Dustin made his timely escape to Jonathan's car. He'd left the rest of the candy bar in the hall, but he had more important things to worry about.

"Guys," he said, yanking open the door to squash himself onto the backseat with Max and Lucas, "guys, we have an emergency."

The other three had his attention immediately, wide-eyed and waiting for what he had to say next. "Upside Down stuff?" said Max.

"Is it El?" Lucas asked.

"Is everyone okay?" Will asked, twisted around in the front seat.

"Steve has a girlfriend."

The silence he was met with suggested that the rest of the party didn't see this for the crisis it was. Amateurs.

"What?" Lucas said, and Max slumped back against the headrest with a sigh. "What the hell does that have to do with anything, dumbass?"

"We need to know who she is," Dustin pressed.

"Uh, no we don't," Lucas frowned at him. "You're only pissed because your 'best buddy Steve' didn't tell you he was dating someone."

"No I'm not," Dustin insisted. It was maybe a little bit true, but they didn't need to know that. "Don't you see? Whoever she is, she's a security risk." They continued to stare at him like he was talking garbage, and he groaned, frustrated. "Come on guys, we have to know she's not a threat."

"Why would she be a threat?" Max said.

"What if she ends up involved with the party and the lab and stuff through association," Dustin said, "exactly like how Steve was. Nancy was fighting the demogorgon, Steve followed to help, then *BAM*, he knows about everything."

"I still don't see why this is a problem," Max said sceptically.

"Because," Dustin's patience was running thin. Why couldn't they see how much of a big deal this was, jeez. "Whoever she is, she'll probably find out about El at some point, it's inevitable. And we have to keep El safe, guys."

The three of them stared at him, and Dustin's point must have finally hit home, because they all actually looked worried. About time.

"Fine," Lucas caved, although he looked pretty pissed about it, "what are we going to do about it?"

"We're all going to Steve's tomorrow night, right?" It was something they did once in a while to give everyone's parents an evening off, watched movies and played games and ate junk, and Steve was really cool about letting them do whatever they liked. Even El was allowed, if they were careful. Dustin secretly thought the list of rules written by Hopper that Steve kept taped to the fridge when they were over was pretty lame, but whatever.

"Yeah," Max perked up a bit at that. She wasn't always allowed to go.

"Then we'll look for clues," Dustin said, "anything to help us figure out who she is."

"I'm not sure," Will said, frowning a little, "but I guess if it's to keep El safe..."

Lucas sighed. "It's stupid, but I'll do it. For El."

"I'm in," said Max.

"Then the majority's in agreement," Dustin beamed. "I'll radio Mike later and let him know the plan. He can tell El too. Maybe she can - "

They had to stop then, because Jonathan was walking down the Wheeler's drive to the car.

"You guys are suspiciously quiet," he said, smiled as he started the engine, "what's up?"

"Nothing," they all said, too quickly, but Jonathan only shook his head and let it drop.

#

Dustin didn't have long to wait to put phase one of his plan into action. Late Saturday afternoon, Steve picked him up to bring him over to his place. The party wouldn't all fit in one car - even with Max's jerkward brother driving her over, there weren't enough seats in Jonathan's car with El thrown into the mix too. Dustin didn't mind; it was worth it to see El. And he was kinda Steve's best buddy after all, he liked that it was only the two of them, sometimes.

"I guess it's your turn to pick the music," Steve said as they set off back towards Loch Nora, one hand on the wheel and the other in the bag of Reese's Pieces Dustin had smuggled out of his mom's snack cupboard, "just don't pick something dumb."

"Since I'm picking from your tapes, there shouldn't be anything in here you think is dumb, should there," Dustin rummaged through the glove compartment, ignoring Steve flipping him off.

"Thin ice, Henderson."

"Yeah, yeah." Dustin paused when he saw a tape that definitely hadn't been in the car the last time Steve had driven him to school. *Bingo*.

"What's this?" he held up the beat-up looking Metallica tape, the case scuffed and a small crack on one side.

Steve glanced at it before his eyes were back on the road. A little too quick to be innocent, if you asked Dustin. "A tape. I thought you were supposed to be smart."

"Yeah, you're hilarious," Dustin said. "But you hate Metallica. You called them - and I'm quoting here, Steve - " he cleared his throat for effect, "'metalhead douchebags whose only use is making people's ears bleed.'"

"It's not mine," Steve said, and Dustin watched him closely. He looked kinda flustered, his ears pink, and eyes fixed on the road with a lot more attentiveness than they had been two minutes ago.

"Whose it is then?"

"I - a friend's."

"Huh. Okay." Dustin didn't push it any further, and picked another tape at random to play in the car. But he grinned as he slid the Metallica case into his pocket - the first piece of solid evidence for Mission Blow the Cover off of Steve's Secret Girlfriend.

#

"Go sit wherever you want guys," Steve said as he waved Lucas, El, Mike and Will into the living room, "I haven't uh, I haven't had the time to tidy up or whatever, so just move stuff if it's in the way."

Lucas wasn't big on cleaning either okay? It was boring and he had better stuff to do with his time. But he liked to think that if his parents were away as much as Steve's were, he'd put a little more effort into straightening things up. There was crap everywhere. He figured they'd at least need the coffee table for snacks and stuff, so being the good guy he was, Lucas grabbed a stack of what he guessed was Steve's schoolwork off the table to put it someplace it was less likely to get covered in Cheez-It crumbs. Or anymore than it already was. He dumped the papers on the ugly plastic chair that belonged to Steve's mom, the one that cost like a thousand bucks because it was

made by a famous designer or some crap, and that none of them were allowed to sit on.

"Lucas, come on!" Dustin hollered at him across the room, "I need you to help me move this chair, its freaking heavy."

"Yeah, yeah, keep your pants on Dustin." A scrap of paper came loose from the rest of the pile and floated down onto the carpet. Lucas rolled his eyes before he bent down to grab it - it wasn't his job to pick up after Steve, Jesus. He was about to just drop it with the rest of the papers, when he saw writing on it that definitely wasn't Steve's. He'd seen Steve's handwriting, like that dumb rule list on the fridge, and that was not it - it was smaller and tidier and a little but smudged. It read:

Miss you already baby

And yeah it didn't say much, but it was obviously from Steve's secret girlfriend. He grinned in triumph and put the note in his pocket. It was the best clue they'd have to help figure out who she was, for sure.

#

Mike didn't really like going to Steve Harrington's house. He didn't think he'd ever really like Steve Harrington either, but he had to grudgingly admit he wasn't so bad as he used to be. And he had a bigger TV than any of the rest of them. And El could be there without anyone's parents asking annoying questions, which was definitely a point in favour of hanging out at the Harrington's place. Steve always had the best snacks in too. Crap. The sudden rush of gratitude for the benefits of spending the evening at Steve's hit him harder than expected, and he reached for something to complain about, just to keep Harrington on his toes, y'know?

"Can you open the doors?" he scrunched up his nose as the others started hauling chairs in closer around the coffee table. "It's hot as shit in here."

"What crawled up your ass and died, Wheeler?" he said, but he was smiling, like Mike had said something funny. Weirdo. "Hang on, just

let me find the key."

He started to empty his pockets out onto the coffee table Lucas had just cleared. It was all the usual kinds of trash, gum wrappers and a paper clip and his car keys, and - a ring? He'd never seen Steve wearing a ring. Not that he cared or anything. He didn't really care about Dustin's stupid plan to figure out who Steve's secret girlfriend was either, but it meant keeping El safe a little bit longer, and the ring was a pretty good clue. It must've belonged to her, who else's could it've been? It was plain silver, kind of thick-looking for a girl's ring maybe, but whatever. There was a shiny black stone in the centre, big and round, and not all that girly either. Maybe Steve was dating some goth girl.

"Got it," Steve held up the little key for the sliding doors out to the pool, shot Mike a smile as he went to go and open them up. Mike couldn't stop himself from smiling back that time - he couldn't wait to tell the other's what he'd found out.

#

"I'll be back to pick you up at ten."

"Yeah, whatever."

"Don't keep me waiting, Maxine!"

Usually, Max would have been mad that Billy'd had to give her lift to wherever the party were meeting, because he *always* made her late fussing about with his hair or whatever. But today, she didn't mind. Not even Billy being an asshole could curb her excitement at getting to spend the evening with the party - letting Lucas hold her hand under the table, and talking with El after not seeing her for weeks. So sure, they were over half an hour late, but Max didn't mind. She darted in as soon as Steve opened the front door to them, didn't bother to say goodbye to her brother, just left him standing on the doorstep with Steve.

She rushed in, grinning in reply to all their enthusiastic hellos, and gave El a hug. It'd taken weeks before either of them were quite comfortable hugging each other, but now she did it without a second

thought. Dustin and Lucas were already arguing over what movie they wanted to watch later, so she left them to it and took a seat on the giant couch. She pulled a stupid, puffy pillow in an ugly green colour out from behind her, and something between the couch cushions caught her eye. She fished it out, cautiously in case it was something gross. But it was only an empty cigarette carton. It looked familiar, which bothered her until she realised it might have been the same brand that Billy smoked. Weird that it was there though - she knew Steve didn't smoke, and she was pretty sure his parents didn't either, since the one time Billy had come to pick her up and had lit up in the hallway, Steve had yelled at him because he'd be in trouble if the house smelt like smoke. Maybe his secret girlfriend smoked them? She bit back a grin, and hid the crumpled packet in her sweatshirt pocket. It was a pretty great clue. She didn't care all that much though, as long as it was better than anything Lucas had found out.

#

The movie was over - although Steve had ducked out to answer the phone near the end and missed the best part - and they were digging through the big stack of barely used board games in the Harringtons' cupboard. Will didn't really mind what they played, so he'd left the others to squabble over it and gone to get another soda from the kitchen. He stopped in the hall though, when he heard Steve speaking quietly on the phone through a door left ajar.

"I miss you too, baby."

Oh. Will couldn't help but smile to himself when he heard that - so Steve did have a secret girlfriend after all. Dustin was one of his best friends, but he had the tendency to get a little overexcited about stuff he cared about.

"Yeah I know. I'm sorry - look, you know you could have stayed here if you wanted, the kids wouldn't have minded."

Will could speak for the whole party when he said that they definitely wouldn't have. If only Steve knew!

"Alright, they might have minded a little bit, maybe Lucas and

definitely Mike, but it's not like they don't know you."

So it was someone they knew? Who?

"If all you're going to do is complain, then I'm going to hang up," Steve said, but his voice was teasing, like he was trying not to smile.

"Yeah yeah, same to you, asshole."

That surprised Will a little, more than just a little. But Steve hadn't said it angrily though... If anything he'd said it sort of sweetly, like when he said 'asshole' he actually meant something else. He said it the same way Max called Lucas 'stalker,' softly and with a happy little smile pulling at the corner of her mouth, holding hands under the table when they thought nobody would notice. So Will was pretty sure Steve didn't mean it nastily, but that didn't really clear things up much - what girl would be okay with being called an asshole? None that Will knew would.

"You'll still come by later?" Steve said. "Pick me up in that sexy car of yours?"

So she drove a cool car... that must narrow it down a bit, Will couldn't think of many people who had cool cars at school at all, never mind girls.

"Oh yeah?" Will could hear the smile in his voice; the sort of wide, happy smile that was impossible to hold back, made your face hurt and every word you said sort of tip up at the end. Steve must have really liked her, whoever she was. "Depends if you can behave yourself. Yeah. See you later, baby."

He hadn't been sure about trying to find out who Steve's secret girlfriend was in the beginning - it wasn't really any of their business, and honestly Will understood when people wanted to keep themselves to themselves, sometimes. It was easier. But Dustin had had a point, they needed to keep El safe in any way they could, even something small like this. And besides, it was kind of fun. Like being a secret detective. And now he had a really good clue to tell the others about.

#

It was almost time for Jim to come and pick them up, which made El feel a little bit sad. She probably wouldn't be able to see everyone again for a few weeks after that evening. But it was hard to be sad properly when she'd had such a good time, had gotten to see Mike, and they were all so excited to find out who Steve's girlfriend was. El already knew, but everyone had been having so much fun guessing, she didn't want to ruin the surprise. She helped herself to more popcorn. The sweet kind was nice. She did not like the salted.

"I'm going to the bathroom," Steve said, stood up, "so you little shits keep an ear out for your rides home, okay?"

El nodded, Dustin saluted, and the rest of them mumbled vague replies as Steve left the room. The moment he was out of the door, the party all gathered closer around the coffee table, Max, Dustin, and Lucas each pulling something from their pockets.

"We've got to be quick guys," Dustin whispered, kind of loud, and everyone leaned in closer. El smiled. This was fun. "Time is of the essence okay, he'll be back any second. What have we got?"

"I - I heard him talking on the phone earlier," Will said. "She's coming to see him later tonight, and she has a um," he hesitated and looked down at the carpet, like he was embarrassed about what he'd heard, "he said she has a sexy car."

"Wow. Okay, okay great stuff," Dustin nodded. "Speaking of cars, I found this in Steve's glove compartment this afternoon." He put a tape down on the table with a flourish. "Steve doesn't even *like* Metallica. He told me it's his friend's," he rolled his eyes, "whatever, buddy."

Max frowned as she told the group about her clue. El thought she might be the one to figure it out first. "I found this between the couch cushions," she held up a smushed packet of cigarettes, "and none of the Harringtons smoke. I thought it might be Steve's... girlfriend's."

"Good! Great work, Max," Dustin grinned. "El, you got anything for us?"

"No," she said, and ate some more popcorn. "I don't need to."

"What? You don't need to? What does that even mean?"

"She said she doesn't have anything, okay?" Mike said, and El gave him a little smile. It was nice of him to want to help her. "I do though. He had a ring in his pocket."

"A ring?" Lucas said. "What kind of ring?"

"A silver one," said Mike, "plain and kind of big, with a black stone in the middle. Pretty good, huh?"

The boys were all getting so excited over the clues, that they hadn't noticed the way Max's face had gone all red, eyes big and mouth open in surprise. El noticed though, and knew Max had guessed right.

"A plus work Mike," Dustin clapped him on the shoulder, "we must be getting close. Lucas, how about you?"

"Read it and weep, boys," Lucas put down his clue with a fancy little wave of his hand. "Handwriting. The ultimate clue."

"Shit," Dustin said, and they all scrambled to get a closer look.

"Does that say 'baby?' Ew."

"Oh God," Max said, and everyone stopped their studying of the note to look at her.

"What is it?"

"I know that writing," Max was still staring at the piece of paper on the table, "and I know who it is."

"What?"

"How?"

"Who is it?"

"Come *on*, Max!"

Max took a deep breath. "It's Billy."

There was silence for a moment, before all the boys tried to talk at once. El cut across them, eyes still on the TV. It would be quicker if she just told them now, instead of them arguing about it. "She's right."

"What?" Dustin said, gaping at her. "You knew?"

El just shrugged, and took some more popcorn. "They both think very loud."

"What?"

"Wait, so you're saying that *Billy* is Steve's secret girlfriend?"

They all started talking over each other again, and El decided to let them get on with it. It wasn't until they all suddenly stopped that she looked up from the TV. Max's brother was standing in the living room doorway. El liked Max's brother - he helped them fight the demodogs, and he understood why El didn't like to talk much about Papa. And he made Steve happy. "Hi Billy."

"Hey, short stuff," he nodded at her. "Come on Max, time to go home. Say bye to all your little weirdos." None of them moved, just kept looking at him. El smiled into her popcorn. "What are you all lookin' at, you little freaks?"

Still no one answered. Steve came back downstairs then, coming to stand next to Billy, smile fading as he took in the silent teenagers gaping at them from his living room carpet. "Why's everyone so quiet? What did you break?"

El saw the moment Dustin decided to speak up. He sat up taller, took a big breath. "Why didn't you tell us -"

Max elbowed him in the side and he stopped talking, blinking at her and looking hurt. She stood up, smiled brightly at Steve and her brother. "We didn't break anything, we're fine." Grabbing Billy by the arm and shooting the boys a warning look, she started to pull her brother out of the room. "Thanks for having us Steve, it was fun."

"Uh, sure," said Steve, not quite convinced by Max's cover up, but apparently willing to let it go. "No problem. I'll see you guys out." The three of them went to the front door, and the boys all started hissing at each other again. El ate more popcorn before Jim got there and told her to stop.

#

"Hey," Steve jogged down the driveway and let himself into the passenger side of the Camaro, "sorry I'm late. Dustin's mom made me come in to say hi when I dropped him home."

"Little shits are lucky to have you," Billy said, leant across the front seat to kiss him, a hand soft against his jaw and creeping up into his hair. Steve melted a little. He kissed him back, drawing Billy's lower lip into his mouth, pressing kiss after soft little kiss to his lips. When he finally drew back, Billy was grinning at him, eyes all big and beautiful and mouth pinked up from where Steve had kissed at it. "Hey."

"Yeah yeah, laugh it up dickhead," Steve flopped back in his seat. "I missed you, okay."

Billy snorted. "You saw me like an hour ago, baby."

"I know."

"Yeah. I uh, I missed you too."

"Also," Steve said, "the kids were there. I could hardly kiss you like that with all those innocent little eyes on us."

"Innocent?" Billy raised an eyebrow. "Do you not know those kids at all? They've seen way more scary stuff than us sucking face."

"Okay, but that's not the point like, at all. You think they're onto us?" He was a little worried about it - they were smart kids, and neither he or Billy were great at being subtle. And yeah, he was pretty sure the kids wouldn't judge them for it, but other people would, if it got around.

"Nah," Billy shook his head, reached across to twist his fingers

together with Steve's, "they won't figure it out."

"Okay," Steve felt a little better, Billy's thumb warm and rough and stroking over the thin skin of his wrist.

"Good," Billy said, "now let go of my goddamn hand so I can drive us someplace fuckin' romantic, okay?"

Author's Note:

Heck, this was self-indulgent.

Didn't realise until afterwards that the miss you thing at the end is basically what Nancy says to Steve at the start of S2. It wasn't on purpose, but I ain't mad at it.